



## New England Fishery Management Council

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### LISTENING SESSION SUMMARY

#### Recreational Groundfish Party/Charter Fishery -Limited Access Program

May 8, 2019

Hampton Inn

10 Plaza Way

Plymouth, MA

The Council held a series of listening sessions to solicit public comment on whether it should develop a limited access program for the recreational party/charter boat fishery for the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan, under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

**Meeting Attendance:** Rick Bellavance (Priority Fishing Charters/RI Party and Charter Association/NEFMC), Scott Steinback (NMFS), Greg Ardini (NMFS), Melanie Griffin (MA DMF), Justine Grassey (Commercial Fisherman), Doug Bankert (Commercial Fisherman), Tim Brady (Capt. Tim Brady and Sons/MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission), Michael Pierdinock (Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association), Libby Etrie (NEFMC), and Mark Grant (NMFS). The following NEFMC members and staff were also in attendance: Terry Stockwell (Groundfish Committee Chair), Jamie Cournane, PhD (Council Staff), and Robin Frede (Council Staff).

*The listening session began at approximately 6:05 pm.*

Terry Stockwell, Chair of the Groundfish Committee, began the meeting with a brief introduction, explaining the purpose of this listening session and options on how to provide comments. Dr. Jamie Cournane gave a brief presentation reviewing *why* the Council is taking action, *what* action has already been taken (control date of March 19, 2018), *what* comments should address, *how* to submit public comments, and next steps.

One attendee asked a clarifying question about the number of permitted for-hire vessels in 2010 and today, and how many are fishing north of the 42-degree line/western Gulf of Maine. Table 2 in the background document only includes active permits that both hold a groundfish party/charter permit *and* have taken at least one groundfish trip (as indicated by vessel trip report [VTR]). There were 511 and in 2010, and 346 in 2018; however, these are not separated by geography.

#### **Comments:**

**Mr. Pierdinock**, board of directors, Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association, commented that some head boat captains who fish in the western Gulf of Maine (GOM) would like to see

something done, and others do not. It is the zero cod possession that is driving decisions, especially those fishing north of 42-degrees in western GOM who have been affected by zero cod possession. He provided an example of what happened with the commercial groundfish vessels in the south shore [of Massachusetts] to demonstrate how zero cod possession affected their history, and when the quotas were allocated, they were on the wrong side of the fence. He is concerned this might happen to the recreational for-hire fleet. Mr. Pierdinock commented that if cod come back, and the fishery goes back up to 511 boats, the fishing pressure will be too great, and then we may face significant cutbacks or another shutdown. He recommended trying to do something to prevent this scenario.

Later, Mr. Pierdinock commented that many valid points have been presented tonight, and this is why Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association has not taken a position. There are members who are for it, and those who are against.

**Mr. Brady**, operates a small head boat out of Plymouth, and is a member of the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission, commented that the fleet has been decimated by zero cod possession. He has seen how implementation of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) and catch shares have affected the spawning biomass of cod when the commercial fleet no longer had trip limits. He has been fishing for over 40-years, and in the last 8-10 years since ITQs, they have been hanging on by a thread. His constituency of the Massachusetts for-hire fleet is split as far as establishing limited access, and there are questions about whether they will be able to keep one cod or not. Mr. Brady commented that north of the Chatham line needs help or there won't be any charter boats left.

**Ms. Grasse**y, runs a boat out of Plymouth, commented that she just got her captain's license and would like to run her own charter boat business, though she is concerned that the control date and a limited access program might affect her ability to start a business. She does not support a program that introduces further restrictions. Ms. Grasse commented that this decision should be focused on scientific data, and not just reducing competition among charter businesses. The consumers should have the right to make a choice about which business they support.

**Mr. Bankert**, commercial fishermen, commented that he has seen charter/party boats out there for the last 40-years, and they are using cod as a reason for why the fleet size has decreased. He said charter boat companies should diversify their businesses and target other species, like haddock, hake, bass or bluefish, of which, there are plenty. He has seen this coming since 2000 when cod were being hammered and there weren't many charter vessels in the south shore of Massachusetts, and then the number of vessels increased and now there are no cod.

*The listening session adjourned at approximately 6:30 PM*